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THE
HARVARD COMMISSION
ON
WESTERN HISTORY

CHARLES ELLIOTT PERKINS
FOUNDATION



HARVARD UNIVERSITY
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

1912

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COMMISSION

Archibald C. Coolidge, Cambridge, Mass.

Andrew McFarland Davis, *Chairman*, Cambridge, Mass.

Horace Davis, San Francisco, Cal.

Charles G. Dawes, Chicago, Ill.

Frederic A. Delano, Chicago, Ill.

Grenville M. Dodge, Council Bluffs, Ia.

Howard Elliott, St. Paul, Minn.

Charles Moore, Detroit, Mich.

Frederic J. Turner, Cambridge, Mass.

Edgar H. Wells, *Secretary*, Harvard University Library, Cambridge, Mass.

Communications concerning the work of the Commission, and material, whether printed or documentary, may be sent to the Secretary.

Gift
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OCT 30 1929

The Harvard Commission on Western History

(Reprinted from the Harvard Alumni Bulletin)

The Corporation has established the Harvard Commission on Western History on the terms suggested in a letter, dated January 27, 1912, which reads in part as follows:

“In the last few years the Department of History, the College Library, the Alumni Association, and a number of friends of the College have been making a strong effort to build up a great collection on the history and development of the West, broadly interpreted. We have as a teacher of Western History the best known authority on the subject, and his appointment to Harvard has excited general satisfaction and enthusiasm among a number of Western graduates. We are also receiving from Mrs. William Hooper, in memory of her father, the late Charles Elliott Perkins, of Burlington, Iowa, a considerable annual sum for the purchase of books dealing with the West, and we hope in course of time to build up such a collection on this ‘subject’ that Harvard

will be generally regarded as the best place in this country for the study of Western History. We can only accomplish the purpose in view, however, if we have the coöperation of a number of people in the West who can interest themselves in the matter and pick up for us on the spot various important items of local history and literature in manuscripts or in whatever form they may appear. There is a great deal that may be accomplished in this way, but it can only be done by systematic effort reaching a large territory and many people.

“It is respectfully urged, therefore, that the Corporation appoint a commission to be known as the Harvard Commission on Western History, the Charles Elliott Perkins Foundation, and appoint the following members thereto: A. McF. Davis, '55, of Cambridge, chairman; Horace Davis, '49, of San Francisco; General Grenville M. Dodge, of Council Bluffs; Mr. Charles G. Dawes, of Chicago; Charles Moore, '78, of Detroit; Howard Elliott, '81, of St. Paul; F. A. Delano, '85, of Chicago; Professor F. J. Turner; Professor A. C. Coolidge, '87; and E. H. Wells, '97.”

The purpose of this Foundation is to

establish, at the most ancient University of America, a monument to the West and to its importance both past, present and future in shaping the character and the destinies of this country. If the Foundation fulfils the conception of the founder and of the Commission, it will aid in collecting material which will in the future make possible adequate study of the fulfilment of the great faith of the East in the West from the early decades of the nineteenth century on; and it will be a place where all students of American History will find gathered together for convenient use a great mass of books, pamphlets, newspapers, and manuscript material showing the embodiment of this faith in the growth of the West. There will thus be collected in Harvard University Library, as a single storehouse, the means necessary for defining the part played in the making of the West by the foresight of Eastern men in the past, and at the same time of the growth of a new America west of the Alleghenies in which the ideals of all parts of the East have been brought together and reshaped by settlers not only from the East but from the best of the races of Europe.

The scope of the plan is large. It aims

to collect all the material possible, books, pamphlets, newspapers, reports of societies or railroads or other business concerns, and manuscript material whether letters, old accounts or business reports. Such collections would not only exploit the development of the West, but also make it possible to trace out more exactly and comprehensively the many ways in which the East has participated in the building up of the West.

Even as early as the early decades of the nineteenth century the East had a great and enthusiastic faith in the possibilities of the West and in the part which it would play in the Nation before the end of the century. This faith was shown in many ways. Besides the pouring out of capital and of large individual gifts there were various societies founded in the first half of the nineteenth century to promote education in the West, which drew largely on the funds of Eastern men and women who had a vision of the future in the great states beyond the Alleghenies. They helped in the founding and support of western colleges and seminaries and of public schools. Besides these contributions for the support of education and religion, there was a great investment of

capital in many enterprises in the West. The railroads made possible the foundation of the new states, and great lines like the C. B. & Q. and the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fé were founded and financed by Eastern capital, largely contributed by great numbers of people who invested their savings in the bonds and stock of such railroads. Thus, it was not merely the great capitalists but the people of moderate means who contributed their share toward the development of the Western country.

In order to make it possible to write the history of the growth of this great new country of the West, with its strong individuality and its high level of education and morals, it is necessary to collect an enormous mass of material. The main interest in the West has not been in its historical episodes, but in the development of society. This fact makes the task of writing the history more difficult. It is none the less striking and romantic, however, to a historian who has the eye to see things in the large way; but this capacity to see the large outlines must be supported by the exact knowledge of an enormous mass of small facts, and the gathering of many scholars to work on

the material. To make this study possible, then, is the aim of this Foundation. If there can be gathered together the great quantities of books, pamphlets, newspapers and manuscript material which are necessary, the history of the United States as a whole can be written with adequate sources.

To carry out this purpose it has seemed wise to establish this Commission on Western History composed of men whose knowledge of the West and whose position will be a guarantee of the largeness of the aim and the value of the object to be achieved. Of members of the Commission, Andrew McFarland Davis, the chairman, as a young man helped in the survey for one of the first railroads in Wisconsin and afterwards lived in California for several years. He has written on the West and on Canadian affairs in Winsor's Narrative and Critical History of America. His special subject has been the history of banking and currency in the United States. His brother, Horace Davis, '49, of San Francisco, was at one time president of the University of California and is now the senior trustee of the Leland Stanford, Jr., University. General Grenville M. Dodge, of Council

Bluffs, is the only surviving general of the Civil War, on the Northern side at least, who had an independent command. He was chief engineer of the Union Pacific Railroad from 1866 to 1870 and chief engineer of the Texas and Pacific Railway from 1871 to 1881; he was president of the President's commission to inquire into the management of the war with Spain and was commander-in-chief of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion in 1907-8. Charles G. Dawes, now president of the Central Trust Company of Illinois in Chicago, was comptroller of the currency 1897-1902. Howard Elliott, '81, is president of the Northern Pacific Railway, a railway which is still carrying on the process of opening up the further regions of the West and filling them with settlers. F. A. Delano, '85, is president of the Wabash Railroad, which traverses a great portion of the nearer West. Both Elliott and Delano were trained under Mr. Perkins, in whose memory the Foundation is named. Professor F. J. Turner, formerly of the University of Wisconsin, is recognized as the leading authority on the history of the West. Professor A. C. Coolidge, '87, is Director of the University Library. E. H. Wells, '97, is General Sec-

retary of The Harvard Alumni Association.

There is already at Cambridge, or within practicable reach of it, one of the largest collections to be found anywhere of material for the study of the history of America. The College library has an almost unequalled collection of the national documents; it has great masses of material on the anti-slavery movement which spread so largely in the West; it has its Parkman collection which includes maps and books used by Mr. Parkman for his great series of histories; it has the Arthur Lee manuscripts, the Gage manuscripts and Sparks manuscripts, with much unpublished material; it has an exceedingly strong collection of maps, and early newspapers, and the material used by Justin Winsor for his great histories. It is therefore in American History undoubtedly the strongest university library in the country. Besides these collections in the College library, there is the Law School library which has an unequalled collection of reports and statutes of the various states, and in the Divinity School library there are great quantities of early church material.

Then in Boston, there are the collec-

tions of the Massachusetts Historical Society and of the New England Genealogical Society and the special collections of the Boston Athenaeum and of the Boston Public Library. At Worcester, only an hour away, there is the Library of the American Antiquarian Society which is especially strong in early newspapers. At Providence, an hour away in another direction, is the John Carter Brown Library which is unequalled in early and rare Americana. No other single university in the country affords such facilities for the study of American History.

Thus it is aimed to maintain at Harvard an eastern centre where undergraduates and advanced scholars can study the West, the part it has played in American life, and the experiences and ideals that have accompanied the march of the American people into the new lands. This, it is believed, will conduce to a more adequate conception of America in general, and of the forces of national development.

The establishment of the Commission on Western History which is announced in this number of the BULLETIN has high promise in various ways. To begin with, the Commission will strengthen the schol-

arly resources of the University in a subject where it is part of the tradition of Harvard to be strong. We have already great collections of materials in American history; and when these are increased by a mass of material for the special study of the West they may easily become unsurpassed and perhaps unsurpassable. Moreover, such a collection will increase the usefulness of the University to scholars in other institutions by bringing under a single roof material which will be at the service of all scholars. The fact noted on another page that 1210 volumes from our collection of historical sources were loaned to scholars outside the University in a single year shows the possibilities of this service. A large collection of books, pamphlets, newspapers and manuscripts showing the growth of the great states beyond the Alleghenies will be a boon to every earnest delver in American history.

Even more stimulating to the imagination, however, are the possibilities of the influence on students of the new impulse to the study of American history and the increased breadth of vision which this study must take on in the presence of so wide-ranging a collection. For any adequate study of this history the accumula-

tion of a vast mass of details is essential, for the impressive thing about America is the high level of the average of citizenship and the way it is shot through and through with ideals and strong moral purpose. Far greater masses of population have here hitched their wagons to the stars than ever felt any relationship to the stars before. A large and increasing collection on the history of the West, the region of the country where this peculiar distinction of America is most strongly displayed, will be a constant feeder of faith.

* * *

That the work of the Harvard Commission on Western History should spring from seed sowed in a memorial to Charles Elliott Perkins is eminently fitting, for he was a leader among the men who, born of New England ancestry, on the other side of the Alleghenies, devoted their lives to the building of new commonwealths and to the transformation of the prairies from feeding grounds for great herds of buffalo to farms and villages and humming cities populated by men from the East and the South and the countries across the sea. These builders of states knew that mankind cannot live by bread alone, and the multiplication of schools and colleges and

the planting of churches were tangible witnesses to their faith in the intangible spirit. They were sound and energetic business men, and made money for themselves and the stockholders they served, but their sense of the practical demands of life did not cloud the visions of the future empire they were helping to create. All through the states of the Central West the name of Mr. Perkins is still fragrant with honor. It is a good thing for the University and for the young men who live and study in it to have the memorial of such a man form a part of the greater monument to the growth and the living aspirations of the West.

* * *

Graduates throughout the country can be of the greatest aid to the Commission in its undertaking, for it desires to collect material of the most varied sort. It aims to gather not only books and pamphlets containing descriptions of the West in the early days, but also reports of corporations and other business enterprises which were making investments in the West, old books of accounts, now stored away perhaps in attics and lofts, and especially letters and old newspapers from every section of the West. Graduates are

strongly urged to bring any such material to the notice of the Commission, whether it is in their own possession or that of other people. Great masses of documents are constantly burned which would be invaluable to future historians in their efforts to restore the lineaments of the past.

In many cases where there are family papers or small collections of material the owners may be brought to see that this great collection is the most fitting place in which they can rest. A small collection, no matter how valuable, loses much of its value to scholars if it be isolated. Here will be a great memorial to the spirit and the ideals of the West which can be built up by a multitude of small collections, and the small collections will take on a new value and importance from the largeness of the whole enterprise.

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